

Statement of Ted Leonard
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Before the House Transportation Committee
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Good afternoon Chairman Taylor, Chairman Keller and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Ted Leonard and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania AAA Federation which is the state association of the eight AAA clubs in Pennsylvania, encompassing 3.2 million member-motorists.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide information on the important issue of Distracted Driving. Any task that requires a driver to take their eyes or attention off the road is a distraction and should be avoided while the vehicle is in motion, including the use of handheld or hands-free cell phones.

Distracted driving tops drivers' list of growing dangers on the road according to a survey released just last week by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Their annual Traffic Safety Culture Index shows that 88 percent of drivers believe Distracted Driving is on the rise, topping other risky behaviors like: Aggressive Driving, Drivers using drugs and Drunk driving. The proportion of drivers who report talking on a cell phone regularly or fairly often when behind the wheel jumped 46 percent since 2013. Nearly half (49 percent) of drivers report recently talking on a hand-held phone while driving and nearly 35 percent have sent a text or email.

Despite their behavior, nearly 58 percent of drivers say talking on a cellphone behind the wheel is a very serious threat to their personal safety, while 78 percent believe that texting is a significant danger. A recent study by the AAA Foundation shows drivers talking on a cellphone are up to four times as likely to crash while those who text are up to eight times as likely to be involved in a crash. In 2015 the AAA Foundation released two studies on Distracted Driving. The first study found that after a driver has finished making a call, tuning the radio, or composing a text via voice command that distraction can last for an additional 27 seconds. The second study found that 58 percent of teen driver crashes were due to driver distraction. The risk of a 16-or-17 year old driver being killed in a crash increases

44 percent when 1 passenger younger than 21 is in the vehicle; doubles when 2 passengers younger than 21 are in the vehicle; and Quadruples when 3 or more passengers are in the vehicle. The study also showed in 50 percent of rear impact crashes, the driver exhibited no reaction at all before the crash, meaning there was no braking or steering to avoid the crash.

While AAA strongly supports texting bans, we do not have a position on handheld bans. Based on the AAA Foundation's extensive research into cognitive distraction, AAA warns drivers not to use a cell phone – whether handheld or hands-free – while behind the wheel. Hands-free is not risk free.

Having said that, there are two sections of House Bill 1684 I would like to note. The first is that the ban only applies when the car is in motion. AAA recommends that drivers not use cell phones for non-emergency calls while operating a vehicle even if the car is stopped. Research found that potentially unsafe mental distractions can persist for as long as 27 seconds after dialing, changing music or sending a text using voice commands. At the 25 mph speed limit in the Foundation study, drivers travelled the length of nearly three football fields. During this time motorists could miss stop signs, pedestrians or other vehicles while the mind is readjusting to the task of driving.

Secondly, the bill only bans engaging in a call while on a handheld phone. The definition of “engaging in a call” is somewhat narrow. The term does not include holding a handheld mobile telephone to activate, deactivate or initiate a function of the phone. This may allow for using the phone for other functionalities such as taking a picture or playing a game. I would note that in our most recent survey of AAA members in Pennsylvania 85 percent would favor passing a state law banning the use of handheld cells phones while driving.

Distracted driving not only increases the risk of a crash but may also increase the severity of a crash. For this reason, we would appreciate your consideration of a standard or primary seat belt law. Appropriate seat belt use is the single most effective driver and passenger behavior that reduces deaths in motor vehicle crashes. According to PennDOT's 2016 *Crash Facts*, of the total number of fatalities in vehicle crashes, 52.2 percent were not wearing a seat belt. According

to NHTSA, states with a primary seat belt law had higher seat belt use rates (92% vs. 83%) in 2016.

Our experience with drunk and drugged driving and other serious safety issues tells us discouraging dangerous behaviors requires a multi-pronged approach: good legislation, effective enforcement and effective public education.

AAA supports educational efforts to inform drivers of the safest practices to cell and smart phone use and other integrated in-vehicle communication, information and entertainment devices as well as the many other forms of distraction.

Any level of risk is too high when it comes to safe driving. Tasks that require a driver to take their eyes or attention off the road or hands off the wheel while the vehicle is in motion should be avoided.